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10 August 1972

MEMORANDUM

Recommendations for Improving the US
Bombing and Mining Program

The attached report surveys the US bombing and mining program as outlined by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It presents an analysis of that program in the light of what we know of North Vietnamese resiliency during the 1965-68 period and the current status of their transportation system and their economy. While it is not intended to be a detailed analysis of the impact of the bombing and mining program it does reach certain conclusions regarding shortcomings in the program thus far observed. These are the following:

A. Despite the greater degree of concentration of effort against certain targets now, compared to the 1965-68 period, far too many strikes are being expended against marginal "storage" areas and far too few against transportation targets.

B. The heavy emphasis on the Panhandle transportation network, about 70%, is inconsistent with the strategic purposes of the program. A far greater proportion of total strikes should be directed against the road and rail system in northern North Vietnam.

C. To the extent operationally feasible, the main thrust of the LOC interdiction effort should be targeted into the 25-mile buffer zone to keep under frequent attack the road and rail transshipment areas just south of the Chinese border.

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D. The industrial targeting thus far appears optimum, and it is doubtful that the overall objectives of the program would be further served by more intensive (or extensive) bombing of these or additional economic targets.

E. The strikes targeted against the repair facilities -- with the exception of the few related to the repair of rolling stock -- will probably yield a fairly low return. It would be exceedingly costly to attempt to negate North Vietnam's capability to repair trucks and small watercraft by strategic bombing.

F. Strikes against the main petroleum depots have been largely successful, and attempts to destroy dispersed storage would be very unprofitable. It would be better in the future to concentrate bombing on a round-the-clock effort against the POL resupply channels, particularly the pipeline from the PRC. Such an effort will be difficult, but there would appear to be no other way to effectively prevent Hanoi from rebuilding its POL stocks.

G. Finally, the total number of sorties presently being flown are almost certainly too few in number for keeping the essential targets under sustained interdiction. Some improvement in the sortie/target ratio can undoubtedly be made by a greater concentration of the current effort, notably by fewer strikes in the Panhandle. However, the task of interdicting North Vietnam's transportation system is a mammoth one, and the current level of sorties is quite inadequate.

H. We understand that there are large stretches of seacoast north of Haiphong which have not been mined. Further some coastal craft in the area have been observed, possibly coming from China. This type of traffic, if not stopped, could develop into a very large loophole in the maritime import denial effort.

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